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MEMORIAL.

To the Honorable the Congress of the Confederate States of America:

The bill before you to amend the Conscription Act, by repealing all exemptions except of such persons as the President and Secretary of War may think proper to release, will, if adopted, be seriously detrimental to the press of the Confederacy, if not destructive of its existence.

In behalf of the Press Association, comprising every daily paper issued within the limits of the Confederate States, I respectfully ask that no change be made in the present exemption law, so far as relates to them. It is scarcely necessary to call your attention to the unquestionable fact that the vitality of our present revolution has been in the spirit of our free press—at once the expression and the conductor of the sentiment and feeling of the people, fostering, conveying, and extending their influence with a mighty power—based upon the most extraordinary unanimity that has ever characterised any people. As the chief and potent means of diffusing knowledge among the masses, and of concentrating the convictions of the public mind in relation to great principles embodying the rights and interests of man, politically, morally, and socially, the press has been engaged most successfully in proclaiming and inculcating them.

It has ever been the pride of our Southern sovereignties that our people were educated in the great truths that are the proper basis of self-government—those principles that were adopted and established by our fathers of '76—cherished, illustrated, and enforced by means of an independent press.

What would be the condition of the South now had it, a few years since, been deprived by despotic power of this great bulwark of independence, characterised in the noble *Areopagetica* of Milton, as "the

palladium of liberty?" How could public opinion have been concentrated upon the single question of the policy, value, and interests of our special institution, but through a free press? I might extend the argument on its importance, but it is a work of supererogation, and would be an insult to your understandings. I will simply confine myself to the utilitarian view of its immediate value to the Government, considered as an essential vehicle of communication between the Government and the people, at an insignificant cost considering the magnitude of results compared with the small number of conscripts engaged in its service. Apart from its importance to the Ordnance Department to procure materials, to the Quartermaster for contracts and transportation, to the Commissary for supplies, could the Adjutant General communicate his orders to even the counties of a single State with five times the number of officers that are now detailed for the whole press of the Confederacy? There is no bureau of the Government that is not indebted to the daily press for the transmission of its orders and wants, and in no other way could this be effected with the rapidity, extent, and certainty, that the press effects it.

Where under peculiar circumstances attending the Government, its bureaus have been unable fully to clothe and feed our armies in the field, through the daily press a thousand local relief societies have been called into existence by our noble women, and the public sympathies concentrated into an active form, to the eminent advantage of the public service, and relief of the Government.

How could the gallant deeds of our heroic soldiery be spread through the length and breadth of the land, to stimulate and encourage to greater achievements, but by the press? With an anxiety seldom, if ever, equalled, has every household watched our armies from day to day, through the public prints. With the avidity of deepest personal concern are they eagerly sought to satisfy the craving for information of the progress of our arms.

With unexampled unanimity have the people of the Confederate States sprung forward with spirit, energy, and will, to achieve their independence—with patriotism, characteristic of their ancestry, they have united in the great effort to work out the salvation of their country, and illustrate its true character, and in this mighty struggle the power of the daily and weekly press has been the great lever of revo-

lution. Their zeal and untiring exertion have been exhibited with unparalleled unanimity. This power of the press rests entirely upon the fact, that its freedom has been unsullied even by the taint of suspicion. Let its liberty be but suspected—let it go forth that the press is dependent upon the individual will of Government officials for the personal freedom of even a portion of its necessary workmen—and the strongest support of a Government professing to act in compliance with the will of the people will be destroyed.

Public discussion of principles and powers of Government, of men and measures, have been so clearly esteemed a right and duty of freemen that the idea of trammeling it has ever been properly considered subversive of the prerogative of the sovereign people. If there be a right more important than others, next to freedom of conscience and thought, it is that which an independent freeman claims in being heard through the medium of the press.

> "This is true Liberty, when free-born men,
> Having to advise the public, may speak free,
> Which he who can, and will, deserves high praise;
> Who neither can, nor will, may hold his peace;
> What can be juster in a *State* than this?"

Although the Constitution prohibits the making of laws "abridging the freedom of speech or of the press," and it is not to be expected, in this enlightened age, that direct legislation will ever be attempted for the purpose, still the first step indirectly to stifle its existence is to place it under censorship. Once allow the Government the power of deciding on exemptions for the press, and the liberty of the latter is not only abridged, but its independence is gone. Implicit confidence may exist in the integrity, honesty, and patriotism of the individuals who exercise that power, but the motto of the press is, *Principia, non homines.*

The principal necessity for the exemption of men liable to conscription for the service of the press, results from the limited number of expert compositors and pressmen in the South. The patriotism of our young men has largely depleted the newspaper offices, so that scarcely one exists that is not half-handed. The work of composition and working the press is what needs details—the other duties, such as clerkships, are usually performed by persons who are not conscripts.

In the report of the Chief of the Bureau of Conscription, the number of printers reported as exempt under the law, includes all who are engaged in job printing for the various governmental departments, and embraces also lithographic printers. These constitute a much larger proportion than those engaged on the daily press In Columbia, S C, for instance, there are two daily papers, on which are employed twelve conscripts, while in two establishments where Government work is done for the treasury, quartermasters, commissaries, surgeon general's department, &c., there are thirty-eight

There are now published in the Confederacy forty-one daily papers, on which are employed, by returns recently made to me, an average of fifteen persons each, of which number fully one half are non-conscripts.

If the question of value to the Government of communicating the orders of the departments be alone considered, I hesitate not to say that the number of men required to communicate them, and then imperfectly, slowly, and often with extreme difficulty, would outnumber ten times those required for the daily press.

I ask leave respectfully on the part of the daily press to indulge the hope that your honorable body will enact no law which by indirection may abridge, intellectually or mechanically, the freedom of the press, or in any way tend to check its unquestionable mission, which is to promote and diffuse knowledge and protect the liberties of the people. The hope of advancing civilization is in the protection of vital constitutional provisions, freedom of speech, and freedom of the press, and I trust that such protection will be eminently characteristic of our Southern Confederacy.

R. W. GIBBES, M. D.,
President Press Association C. S. A.

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